

By ELLEN KAYE

Bringing it all back home

Their rambling farmhouse is far from conventional — because they never return empty-handed from their many travels abroad.

THE HOUSE'S OLDEST SECTION IS AN EARLY-18th-century "keeping room" detailed with a walk-in fireplace, ceiling beams and rough plaster. In it, farm furniture, pewter, and early English and American pottery co-mingle with Indonesian brass, contemporary Turkish carpets and Central American sculptures. And, oh, yes, on the wall opposite one that showcases a 19th-century Seth Thomas clock there is a painting by a Connecticut jazz musician/artist, circa 1955.

Welcome to the Rosenbergs' version of Pennsylvania exurbia.

General Electric executive Bob Rosenberg and his wife, Barbara, a food/wine writer, were "corporate gypsies" during the early years of their marriage. They lived in Colorado, Kansas and Connecticut before GE sent Bob to Philadelphia 21 years ago.

The Rosenbergs put down deep roots: They live in the same 18th/19th-century farmhouse they bought in 1966. They raised their two sons in it, and they plan to stay in their empty nest indefinitely. Barbara says, "It's a funny old house with crooked floors and a dirt basement. But nothing we could live in would ever feed our souls in quite the same way."

It wasn't always so. When the Rosenbergs bought it, the house's floors sported "orangy" shellac, and its beams were painted white. There were textured wallpapers, in turquoise or in big floral patterns. The former owners, Barbara says, had "done everything they could to destroy the character of the house." But since most of the original construction and architectural details remained, Barbara simply redecorated the surfaces, "and that brought back the flavor of an old home."

The Rosenbergs began to buy antiques when they lived in Connecticut. They continued buying them in Pennsylvania, and Bob usually accompanied his wife on her forays. "But we're not sticklers," Barbara says. "Neither one of us has the instinct of a collector. We just bought things we saw that we liked and that were affordable."

So far, so conventional. And the rambling farmhouse might have wound up looking much like others of its ilk if the Rosenbergs didn't have another passion equal to that for their home: They

Travel. Capital T. Once they had established Pennsylvania as their permanent home, the Rosenbergs began to wander worldwide part time. Since 1966, they have indulged themselves with at least two foreign trips a year. And each trip has resulted in contributions to their home. Barbara says, "I just buy small things that seem to fit." Nevertheless, the Pennsylvania farmhouse has gradually developed a dual personality: It reflects its origins and its owners' peripatetic lifestyle almost equally.

After a 1970 trip through the French wine country, Bob started making his own wine and converted the dirt-floor basement into a wine cellar. "It's the perfect temperature," he says. Barbara uses Mexican pottery to serve her gourmet meals, and she hangs Indonesian masks outside the room she uses as a writing office.

Barbara allows that the decor of the Pennsylvania farmhouse is becoming slightly schizophrenic. But never mind. "We like it," she says. "It holds a lot of great memories. It feels good just walking in." □

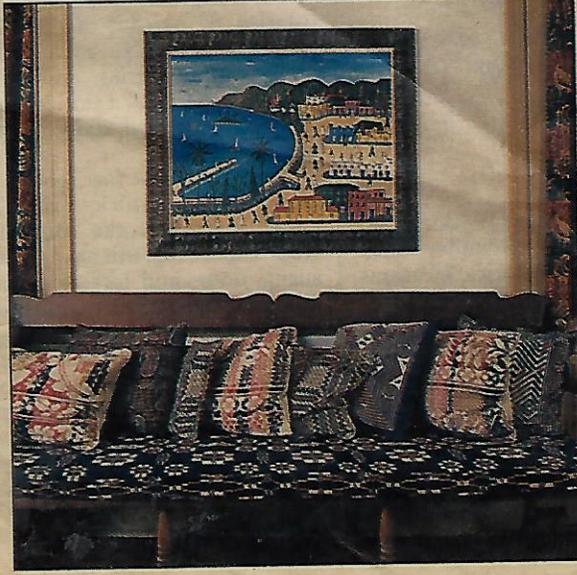
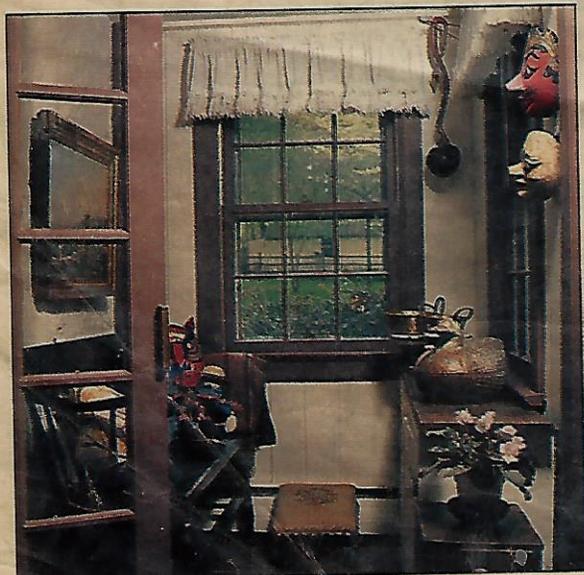


LEFT: The "keeping room" of Bob Rosenberg in Radnor is filled with Americana and foreign exotica.

RIGHT: Furniture in the mud room in the pastoral principal is a mix of 19th-century and contemporary, including a Thai wooden bench, Indonesian brass, and copper from various countries.



ABOVE: The living room, added in the late 18th century, features a Federal-style fireplace and elegant paneling. Among its accouterments are Thai and Indian wood sculptures, Turkish brass, and an 18th-century German primitive painting.



LEFT: In the living room, an antique church bench has a cushion upholstered in a 19th-century American coverlet, pillows made from early American textile remnants, and modern Asian and Indonesian ones. Above the bench is a Haitian primitive oil painting.